

2021-22 Mississippi State Men's Basketball Quotes

Mississippi State vs. Missouri – February 18, 2022

Mississippi State Head Coach Ben Howland

Opening Statement

BH: “Obviously, really excited to get the win tonight, we needed it desperately. We knew it would be a hard fought, physical game, which is always the case when you play Missouri. They’re sound fundamentally and are tough and physical. We did one of our best defensive jobs in a long time, holding someone to 31 percent is really pleasing.”

“I thought we handled the pressure well. They were really getting into us – pressuring the ball, denying the leads and trying to blow up handoffs. We only had nine turnovers and had 16 assists. I thought D.J. [Jeffries] had one of his best games all-around as a Bulldog with two steals, five assists, zero turnovers and great defense on [Javon] Pickett. He shot the ball well and had two big three’s for us.”

“I thought that Garrison [Brooks] had another solid game, where he gets 10 [points] and seven [rebounds]. Iverson [Molinar] was very efficient. They were trying to double him every time he had the ball. I thought Shak [Shakeel Moore] gave us good minutes off the bench with only one turnover. He distributed the ball well. He missed a couple shots that he’s going to make in the future here. I think Andy [Andersson Garcia] gave us a big lift off the bench especially in the first half. He made a couple big steals, and we were able to get the lead to 11-7 with his play and intensity.”

Q: What did you see from Tolu Smith in the second half different from the first half?

BH: “He was frustrated [at halftime] after missing some easy layups in the first half and even early in the second half. I was happy about his free throw shooting. I thought he had a much better second half. He’s played his fourth game in a row now. So, I think he’s going to start to get his legs back. I was happy for him because he’s been through a lot this season. It was good to see him play a good game.”

Q: Shakeel Moore only had two points but had the best plus minus on the team. Is that a testament to the defense and ball distribution he provides?

BH: “That’s what I told him after the game. I went up to him and said that he did things to help his team other than make baskets, and that’s important. I thought he was very good for us defensively, solid handling the ball, and had some nice passes that led to baskets and guys getting fouled. He played very solid, and I was really pleased with how he played.”

Q: How do you approach a back-to-back with the same team?

BH: “With one day of rest in between, it’s not easy. They [Missouri] had difficulty getting here and didn’t get here until the day of the game because of some problems. Give them credit, they’ll be very rested and ready to battle us again. That’s going to be a really hard-fought game in Columbia.”

Q: How big were the contributions between Andersson Garcia and Javian Davis to get your second unit going?

BH: “It was huge. It’s a tough defensive matchup with the big’s for JD [Javian Davis] because he had to be on the perimeter. He got two quick fouls in the second half. He scored and scored again in the second half. He’s a good low post scorer. Hopefully, we can keep him out of foul trouble in the next game. When Tolu [Smith] is not in there, we can go to him more. Andersson, I pointed out, had a great all-around game. He had a couple steals in the first half. He made a couple of nice cuts. He had eight rebounds. He really stepped up tonight and continues to earn more minutes.”

Forward DJ Jeffries

Q: How good does it feel to finally get a win after you guys were so close on the road and even at home against Tennessee? What was it like to get that monkey off your back?

DJ: "It was a big relief. We have been fighting so hard these last couple games to get a win, and we finally got one. So, we're just trying to start a little streak here. We have to go back and play them Sunday at their place, and it's going to be another tough one. We have to keep the same intensity and fix some of the minor adjustments to just keep building on this win."

Q: Obviously with the losing streak you guys have had, I know you guys are trying to get back in the NCAA Tournament conversation. What is the mentality of this team right now knowing that this is one win, but you also have to win the next few as well?

DJ: "We are just taking everything one game at a time, and we are not overlooking anybody. Like you said, we kind of messed ourselves up with that losing streak. So, we're just trying to build and win to get our name back in that conversation."

Q: How have you guys treated six or seven losses. How do you guys stay together as a team and not let the wheels fall off?

DJ: "It was definitely tough, but a lot of us have hit a lot of adversity in our college career. So, the veterans came in, and we had a meeting to try and fix everything. Tonight, we got a win. So, we just have to build on it and fix what we did wrong tonight. We all want to make it to the [NCAA] Tournament, so we just have to do that and keep winning to see what happens."

Forward Tolu Smith

Q: D.J. just told us there that the veterans kind of sat down and had a meeting there the other day. When was that meeting, and what did you guys talk about?

TS: "We had set up a meeting either before the Tennessee game, or after the Tennessee game, I can't remember which one, but it was somewhere in that stretch. We were just trying to figure everything out, discussing everything without the coaches and we kept it real with each other. We just basically expressed to each other what we needed to do, and what we needed to fix. I think it was a good talk for us."

Q: Is it good sometimes to not have the coaches there and just have player led accountability?

TS: "Yeah, that's great. It just goes to show that your team wants to win, and we're not going out without a fight. Just having that passion and that drive that each of those guys have motivates me and motivates the rest of the team. So, I'm just glad that I was able to talk to those guys with authenticity."

Q: You had some rough luck in the first half with some shots that wouldn't fall, but in the second half you looked like your old self. You were very aggressive to the hole and got some shots to fall. How were you feeling in the second half?

TS: "I was missing easy [shots] and was just trying not to get sped up. I knew I had a mismatch, but honestly, I just needed to slow down. Coach Howland pulled me aside and just told me to slow down. My team did a great job of getting me the ball, and coach did a great job scheming up plays for me."

Q: How important was it for you guys to be able to hold Kobe Brown to zero points in the first half?

TS: "He's a great player and is very versatile. I give both he and Missouri a lot of props. For us to hold him down was a key factor in our progress and our win. So, we tried to limit his shot attempts and limit his ability to get to the rim. It was a great turnout for us."

Q: You guys had the most bench points in a game since the game against South Carolina. How important was it for you guys to get guys like Andersson Garcia and Javian Davis going tonight?

TS: "It was great, even Cameron Matthews and Derek Fountain did a great job. Andersson Garcia did a great job jumping in the passing lanes and got a great dunk. JD [Javian Davis] did a great job and got himself a dunk as well. A great spark off the bench is what we need; every great team needs a great bench."

Q: How are you feeling about getting more minutes and more consistent playing time?

TS: "I'm feeling good and just trying to get back into the groove of things. I'm trying to help this team win in whatever fashion that may be, and that is what I plan on doing. We're not going to give up; please do not give up on us State fans. We're going to keep pushing."

Missouri Head Coach Cuonzo Martin

Opening Statement

CM: "Credit to Mississippi State for winning the basketball game. A lot of guys gave great effort. It was just looking like we ran out of gas a little bit. I thought what they did a good job of was really pounding the ball, which we anticipated. They just put pressure on us in the low posts. I thought that was the big difference. I thought we did a solid job on [Iverson] Molinar, but the two big guys [Garrison Brooks and Tolu Smith] imposed their will on us."

Q: Was the team unable to have a shootaround?

CM: "No, we didn't have a shootaround at all, we didn't have anything. That's part of it. You just would like to know sooner, because we were proactive from that standpoint. We wanted to know so we could prepare. No excuses, but at the end of the day, when you try to prepare for a game, the mental edge is just as important. That game routine, pregame, and rest, all of that is important, and to have us at the airport from 8:30 to almost 2:00, that's a long time. I'd rather the game have been pushed back to Saturday, and we play on Saturday or Sunday."

Q: It seemed like a couple of those live ball turnovers midway through the first half gave Mississippi State momentum. How do those hurt you on the road?

CM: "Those are critical, and unfortunately, there were two of those that were out of character by Amari [Davis]. He's normally a guy that's going to be silent with the basketball. We just need to turn the game, and we never really got over that hump or gained the energy to get back into it."

Q: Obviously it's a unique situation to be playing the same team twice in less than 48 hours. Do you do anything differently coming out of this game to get ready for the next one?

CM: Well, certainly rest. We'll watch film; the second time around, we'll have played them before. We'll be playing at home, but I think with rest, and watching a little film, we'll be just fine. I'm looking forward to it.

Missouri Forward Ronnie DeGray III

Q: Obviously, you guys had some issues getting to town. Do you feel like that plays any role in the offense struggling to get shots?

RD III: "I don't think it caused too much difficulty. It kind of sucked, being in the airport that long, but we've prepared and practiced for this day. We just kind of came out to a slow start, which we need to work on."

Q: You guys had 20 points in the paint, which is a season low. What do you think was the issue there?

RD III: "I just think we were rushing shots. We weren't taking it strong to the hoop, and we were trying to get the foul calls instead of going through contact and finishing. They're not really trying to block shots. They were just walling up. So, I think we were trying to get fouls more than we were trying to get shots."

Q: How tough is it when the opposing team has multiple guys that are big and can score like that?

RD III: "It's tough, especially when they get the ball a lot, so you really have to be on point with that. We were trying to blitz, but sometimes we'd get slow behind, and they would make tough shots. Overall, it was just a tough day at the office."